

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE HONOURABLE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1799.

Jovis, 28^o die Februarii, 1799.

ORDERED, *Nemine contradicente,*

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend DOCTOR HAY, for the Sermon by him preached Yesterday, before this House, at *Saint Margaret's, Westminster*; and that he be desired to print the same: And that Lord Viscount *Belgrave* and Mr. *Buxton* do acquaint him therewith.



J. LEY,

Cl. D. Dom. Com.

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A
S E R M O N

Preached before the HONOURABLE

H O U S E of C O M M O N S,

AT THE

CHURCH OF ST. MARGARET, WESTMINSTER,

ON

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1799,

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL
PROCLAMATION,

TO BE OBSERVED AS

A DAY OF SOLEMN FASTING AND HUMILIATION.

BY THE

REVEREND THOMAS HAY, D.D.

CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR J. WALTER, CHARING-CROSS.

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M. DCC. XCIX.

S E R M O N

Printed before the House

HOUSE of COMMONS

AT THE

CHURCH OF St. Margaret Westminster

ON

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1799.

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL

PROCLAMATION

TO BE OBSERVED AS

A DAY OF SOLLEMNITY AND ABSTINENCE



THE

REVEREND THOMAS HAY, D.D.

CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. WALKER, CHANCERY-LANE.

1799.

M. DCC. LXXIX.

ISAIAH, VIII. 13, 14.

SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS HIMSELF;
AND LET HIM BE YOUR FEAR, AND LET HIM
BE YOUR DREAD. AND HE SHALL BE FOR A
SANCTUARY.

IN the dispensations of the Almighty towards individuals, we perceive a state of things actually existing very different from that which the weakness of human judgment, would of itself have considered as advantageous to us: we perceive human life to be a mixture of prosperity and adversity, of joy and sorrow, arising either from those consequences of our own actions which God hath appointed, or from some circumstances

cumstances relating to those around us, with whose happiness or misery, from the very condition of our nature, we are in various ways connected, sometimes indeed from the more visible hand of God, of Him who is intimately acquainted with the frame and nature of man, whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts, but who in his infinite wisdom hath ordained this variety of allotments, this portion of sorrow as well as of joy, with a view to the final advancement of general happiness. Contemplate the whole of our existence, the life that now is, and also that which is to come, and these afflicting trials patiently sustained, and duly improved, will doubtless in all cases increase the felicity of those, by whom they are so endured, by obtaining for them “* A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY;” but considering man, even with respect to this life, affliction itself diligently improved is seen, in numberless instances, to be ultimately productive of solid and essential benefit.

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

WHAT

WHAT is true of men individually, is true of them also as considered collectively in society, and formed into nations and states; with this difference only, that the happiness or misery of states, as such, can be estimated only with respect to this life: but national calamities, from whatsoever source they appear to originate, whether mediately through human causes, or more directly from the inflictions of the Almighty, still constantly proceed from Him, are invariably subject to his controul, to the power of that Being, who in judgment remembers mercy, whose severest dispensations are intended for good, and admirably adapted to promote it. Such are the gracious designs of Providence, even in its most awful visitations; an attentive and religious consideration will readily discover this design, and convert the most afflictive events to their proper ends.

THE words which I have chosen for my text were pronounced by God himself to the Prophet Isaiah, upon
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the prospect of those calamitous dangers which were about to threaten the kingdom of Judah, on the near approach of the strong and numerous armies of the great king, the king of Assyria. They were designed to direct the attention of a careless and headstrong people, to the only just object both of fear and reliance; they announce that, even under the very pressure of the heaviest dispensations of the Almighty, a due sense of God and Religion, and a firm dependence on his providence, will prove our best consolation, and only security; "SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS HIMSELF; AND LET HIM BE YOUR FEAR, AND LET HIM BE YOUR DREAD. AND HE SHALL BE FOR A SANCTUARY."

WE are this day assembled by the wisdom and piety of public authority, to humble ourselves for the forgiveness of our sins, to deprecate the divine displeasure, and to implore the blessing and assistance of the Almighty on our exertions in the conflict in which we

are engaged. On the success of them depends not merely the maintenance of national power, but the preservation of our liberties, and of Religion itself: not only the security of this country, but the safety of the civilized world.

THE successes of the enemy have been indeed so rapid, so extensive, and so important, as justly to excite emotions of the deepest regret and anxiety, in every considerate and serious mind: having, by perfidy and conquest, extended their baneful dominion over some of the fairest and most fertile countries of Europe, they have abolished every vestige of good order and established government, for which they have substituted the jarring elements of their own subtle and ferocious despotism. Although in their own internal government, they have, from time to time, abandoned some of the most specious and seducing theories which marked their pernicious system, as the abolition of these maxims have accidentally become adapted to the in-

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terests

terests of successive factions, and to the exercise of their successive oppressions; still, in their views of increased power, and external conquest, they have been uniformly consistent: they have been constantly actuated by the same destructive projects of aggrandizement; they have pursued these projects by means, both of corrupt arts, and open force; they have laboured with indefatigable wickedness to diffuse their poison through every country, and to subvert every settled government of every denomination. The general view of the present state of Europe, affords us a melancholy representation of the success with which these unjust pursuits have been accompanied, in the subversion of great and flourishing dominions, in the humiliation of some powers, and in the insecurity of others.

THE policy of this country has been uniform and decided: it still continues to assert the inestimable value of those blessings derived from sound Religion, and

also those derived from our frame of civil government, a regular subordination of ranks, an able and impartial administration of justice, flourishing manufactures, a commerce protected and extended beyond the example of former times, a great and increased revenue, individual opulence, and national prosperity. Such are the unrivalled blessings which have long excited the envy, and the inveterate hostility of the enemy: our wealth has been the object of their avarice; our civil constitution, from its admirable wisdom, and the protection which it affords, is the reproach of their anarchy, their licentiousness, and their tyranny; our religion the condemnation of their infidelity; our power the restraint of their aggrandizement. Hence an enmity eager to deprive us of these invaluable privileges, hence the reiterated menaces of the ruin and extinction of the British empire.

UNDER this trying conjuncture, let us calmly consider the conduct of our own nation: not with a view

to advance exalted claims of presumptuous arrogance, highly unbecoming man's best exertions, but to enquire, whether we have endeavoured to satisfy those great public duties incumbent upon us in the course of the present war, with such a regard to our obvious obligations, in the support of the contest itself, as has manifested our sincere desire to fulfil the distinguished and arduous part allotted to us with such an uprightness and integrity, as we may humbly hope, will recommend this part of our conduct to the merciful acceptance of a gracious God. Have we in any instance been unmindful of the solid establishment of the liberties of Europe, and of those objects inseparably involved in the event of this war? It was early seen that we contended for no trivial objects. The declaration of Parliament was confirmed by the good sense of the nation at large, "*(a) that they considered whatever his*

(a) See the Address of the House of Commons on the King's Message, February 12, 1793.

" Majesty's subjects held as most dear and sacred, the
 " stability of our happy constitution, the security and
 " honour of his Majesty's crown, and the preservation
 " of our laws, our liberty and our religion, to be all in-
 " volved in the issue of the present contest, and that their
 " zeal and exertions should be proportioned to the im-
 " portance of the conjuncture, and to the magnitude
 " and value of the objects for which we had to con-
 " tend."

THE zeal and exertions of this country have been
 so proportioned: no effort has been spared which the
 importance of the cause could demand, no opportunity
 has been omitted of evincing the deep sense we enter-
 tained of its serious moment, and of our readiness to
 concur in its most strenuous support. When our very
 coasts were threatened with invasion, the country,
 united as one man, appeared in arms in its defence:
 when large demands were made, for the purposes of
 supplying unavoidable expences, and of supporting
 public

public credit, individuals not only cheerfully contributed their fixed payment towards these great national objects, but large spontaneous gifts were poured in from every quarter, by all ranks and descriptions of men from the highest to the lowest, even by those who were then hazarding their lives in the defence of the country : and very lately, when another mode has been adopted, and a still more ample supply has been proposed, to the honour of the sound understanding and good sense of the country, let it be remembered, that there has been no relaxation whatsoever, in the perseverance and determined exertions of the nation at large ; but the necessity of the measure has been generally admitted, and its wisdom generally approved.

IN the progress of this contest, we have indeed experienced the evils necessarily attendant on a state of war, in a large expence of blood and treasure: we cannot also but feel deeply interested in the successes of the enemy over other European states. But this country, considered

considered distinctly by itself, has, by the war, vindicated the possession of what would otherwise have been materially endangered, if not utterly lost, all the multiplied blessings derived from the security of our civil and religious liberties; it has further acquired signal advantages, and most valuable possessions. By the great naval conflicts, in which, through the blessing of Providence, the British arms have been so eminently successful, this nation has maintained the sovereignty of the sea: of these victories we have felt the value very sensibly; a spirit of grateful and affecting piety has been nobly displayed by those great and good men, whose dauntless valour and consummate skill, in the command of the British fleets, contributed so conspicuously to the achievement of those momentous and glorious victories: I trust and believe, that this spirit of pious gratitude was diffused very widely throughout the country; and that with one general sensation of heart-felt gratitude, the nation looked up
to

to the only Author of all victory, whose protecting providence was so visibly extended to us in these critical conjunctures.

If it be allowable for a state to protect itself from the encroachments and aggressions of other states, we may hope that the efforts to defend itself in this instance, in which so many interests of the highest import are involved, and the sacrifices with which these efforts are attended, may be considered as the discharge of an obligation of no common kind, rather than as the gratification of any passion grounded on worldly interests. The war in which we are engaged is not only just and necessary, but most important in its objects; in the pursuit of those objects we have persevered cordially and vigorously; the means which we have employed have been warrantable and just; our conduct towards the enemy has been open and merciful; towards our allies fair and honourable, and
wisely

wisely liberal ; the dispositions excited by events highly prosperous, have been such as became us as men and Christians.

So far, therefore, all may be well.—But these things being so, let us not be so wanting to ourselves, as to stop our examination here : let each individual appeal to his own heart, and consult his own observation, and then determine, whether, in the fulness of our abundance, we so availed ourselves of those invaluable blessings which we derived from Religion, as to make its precepts our fixed rule of life, its doctrines the unerring motives of our obedience ? Did not a general ease and affluence, too frequently produce a carelessness and neglect of religious observances ? a disgraceful relaxation in the weighty duties of self-government ? such a pursuit of pleasure, of honour, of riches, of worldly interests, as much weakened, if it did not utterly exclude serious and pious impressions ?

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Though we did not cease “* TO RETAIN GOD IN
 “OUR KNOWLEDGE,” was that knowledge assidu-
 ously cultivated? Did all his blessings of nature and
 grace raise in us correspondent sentiments of gra-
 titude and affection; did we refer our enjoyment of
 them to the bountiful Giver “† OF EVERY GOOD
 “AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT,” and render the ho-
 mage of our thankfulness in zeal for his service, in
 respect for his ordinances, in a submissive reverence,
 in an unreserved obedience, in a diligent performance
 of the comprehensive system of Christian duties upon
 Christian principles? In the consideration of the
 awful and sublime truths of Christianity, it is ob-
 vious that a belief of its solemn sanctions is incompat-
 ible with a secure acquiescence in vicious propensities,
 and that some of its exalted doctrines are elevated
 beyond the reach of human reason: were we not in-
 clined to soften and explain away the one, and thus

* Rom. i. 28.

† James i. 17.

remove one of the great barriers against corrupt indulgences? and were we not ready to discover groundless difficulties on the part of the other, and thus flatter the pride of human wisdom? forgetting, in the mean time, that the whole of Christianity must stand or fall together; that all its obligations, and all its doctrines, are universally binding upon our obedience and upon our faith; that however unacceptable some of them may prove to human corruptions, or however mortifying to the pretensions of human reason, still they are the recorded revelation of God, “* THE COUNSELS OF FAITHFULNESS AND TRUTH,” the dictates of infinite wisdom, graciously vouchsafed for the light and guidance of man’s very limited understanding.

If we were seduced into these errors by a prosperous course of things, have the disappointments and

* Isaiah xxy. 1.

difficulties incident to a protracted state of hostilities, led us to a more serious reflection on our duties, or a more conscientious discharge of them? Has the frequent recurrence of these days of national humiliation, been productive of its proper fruits? Have we benefited as largely as we ought, from the melancholy observation of a nation, whose leaders have abjured the principles of our holy faith, and the sacred authority of Religion? Has the example of their crimes, and the dissolution of moral obligation, incident to the removal of religious sanctions, excited in us an increased sense of the importance of Christianity? Great as our guilt would have been, in omitting to act conformably to the pure laws of our Religion, under any circumstances, the neglect of its doctrines and precepts, with such an awful warning continually before us, would still aggravate our condemnation. It is thus, our blessed Lord adduces the inattention to those convincing evidences, which had been employed for the confirmation of his doctrines, as a charge of heightened guilt

guilt against those who had failed to profit by them,
 “ * WOE UNTO THEE, CHORAZIN; WOE UNTO
 “ THEE, BETHSAIDA: FOR IF THE MIGHTY WORKS
 “ WHICH WERE DONE IN YOU, HAD BEEN DONE
 “ IN TYRE AND SIDON, THEY HAD REPENTED
 “ LONG AGO IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES. BUT I
 “ SAY UNTO YOU, IT SHALL BE MORE TOLERABLE
 “ FOR TYRE AND SIDON AT THE DAY OF JUDG-
 “ MENT, THAN FOR YOU.” We are justly answer-
 able for the neglect of every means of improvement,
 both in Christian obedience, and in Christian belief.

IF a sense of the enormities which have been per-
 petrated, and of the signal deliverances which we our-
 selves have experienced; if a consideration of the judg-
 ments as well as of the mercies of the Most High, has
 awakened a more active piety, has roused us from a
 torpid insensibility to religious duty, (and I trust it has
 not been wholly unattended with this blessing) have

we laboured to cherish the zeal so excited, to improve every virtuous impression? Have we still strengthened the high sense we entertain of the blessings of revealed Religion (as the only solid foundation of social and moral duties, the only genuine source of comfort in life, or of hope in death) by an earnest and habitual regard to its divine injunctions? Not indolently satisfied with the progress which we have already made, are we strenuous to advance still further? to “* ABOUND “ MORE AND MORE,” to become more and more fruitful in every good word and work, more fervent in our piety, more kind and diffusive in our benevolence, more strictly vigilant in all the duties of self-government? In a word, more diligent “† TO ADORN THE “ DOCTRINE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR IN ALL “ THINGS?”

IN the estimate which we form of our own advancement, or of our own deficiencies, there is an

* 1 Theff. iv. 1.

† Titus ii. 10.

error which may insensibly mix itself with our opinions, both from the influence of self-partiality, and from the particular complexion of the present times, against which it is therefore necessary to be more especially guarded; this consists in forming a judgment of our religious proficiency as individuals, or of the religious character of the country, from a comparison with other men, or with other countries, whose guilt we may imagine to be greater and more flagitious than our own. Such a comparison can lead only to delusive conclusions, and to an overweening arrogance. The scriptures are our only rule of conduct, our only measure of duty: what other men may be will have no weight in determining our own merit; we are individually answerable for the conformity of our conduct to this perfect rule of life, for the use which we have made of the opportunities of religious knowledge vouchsafed to us, and our proportionable advancement towards Christian excellence.

IF we turn our thoughts more immediately from ourselves, and reflect upon the present eventful period, however we must anxiously deplore the dreadful successes of the enemy, and their widely-extended devastations, it is of high importance that we do not so far disparage Religion, as to imagine that the interference of a powerful superintending Providence can be suspended from the affairs of men. Though the enemy say, that “ * THE LORD HATH FORSAKEN THE “ EARTH, AND THE LORD SEETH NOT,” and that the might of their hand hath done these things; yet the issues of all things are in the hand of God. In frequent instances, the holy scriptures inform us, that the Almighty vouchsafes to use the wicked as the instruments of his vengeance: they are his “ SWORD ” to execute his wrath, the ministers of his anger; “ * HOWBEIT, THEY MEAN NOT SO, NEITHER DO “ THEIR HEARTS THINK SO.” Though the enemy

* Ezekiel ix. 9.

* Isaiah x. 7.

say,

say, “ * BY THE STRENGTH OF MY HAND I HAVE
 “ DONE IT, AND BY MY WISDOM; FOR I AM
 “ PRUDENT: AND I HAVE REMOVED THE BOUNDS
 “ OF THE PEOPLE, AND HAVE ROBBED THEIR
 “ TREASURES, AND I HAVE PUT DOWN THE IN-
 “ HABITANTS LIKE A VALIANT MAN;” “ † SHALL
 “ THE AX BOAST ITSELF AGAINST HIM THAT
 “ HEWETH THEREWITH? OR SHALL THE SAW MAG-
 “ NIFY ITSELF AGAINST HIM THAT SHAKETH IT?”
 God alone hath “ ‡ BROUGHT IT TO PASS, THAT
 “ THOU SHOULDEST BE TO LAY WASTE DEFENCED
 “ CITIES INTO RUINOUS HEAPS.”

AMIDST the vaunted and fatal triumphs of the enemy, the actual state of their own country cannot have escaped our observation. Their insidious sophistries have spread wretchedness through extensive dominions; but in their own land is turbulence,

* Isaiah x. 13.

† Isaiah x. 15.

‡ Isaiah xxxvii. 26.

and discontent: they plunder wealth, they desolate provinces and kingdoms; yet the national treasure is not adequately augmented: * IN THEIR STOUT HEART AND THE GLORY OF THEIR HIGH LOOKS " they subvert established laws, and ancient constitutions of civil government; they satiate the fury of their malice upon whole nations; in the mean time at home the lives and property of individuals are utterly exposed and defenceless: with all those calamities which they inflict upon others, they themselves also are most grievously afflicted: † " THE LORD HATH " OPENED HIS ARMOURY, AND HATH BROUGHT " FORTH THE WEAPONS OF HIS INDIGNATION:" these are at once the fearful weapons of his indignation, and the victims of it.

DARK and mysterious as the counsels of Divine Providence frequently are, and unsearchable by the dimness of human reason, still for whatsoever cause

* Isaiah x. 12.

† Jerem. l. 25.

this ungodliness and violence, “ * AS A TEMPEST
 “ OF HAIL, AND A DESTROYING STORM, AS A
 “ FLOOD OF MIGHTY WATERS OVERFLOWING,”
 have been suffered to spread their desolation ; what-
 ever may be the appointed time when the Almighty
 will “ † CAUSE THE ARROGANCY OF THE PROUD
 “ TO CEASE, AND LAY LOW THE HAUGHTINESS
 “ OF THE TERRIBLE ;” under the terrors of his
 judgments, it is our especial part to consider our al-
 lotted duty.

It should never be forgotten, that those most per-
 nicious principles which have been publicly avowed
 only for a few years, and the fruits of which have
 been so formidably manifested in the abolition of Reli-
 gion, in the overthrow and ruin of states, and in the
 extinction of social order, were of long and secret
 growth ; that in their propagation great talents have
 been most wickedly perverted, to disseminate their

* Isaiah xxviii. 2.

† Isaiah xlii. 11.

deadly influence through all ranks of men, through every civilized state. Every caution, therefore, will not be more than sufficient to guard us against the ravages of this restless impiety, * THIS DECEIVABLENESS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS ;” which with views the most detestable and ruinous which the heart of man can conceive, by means both of insidious malice and open violence, with a thirst of dominion insatiable, † “ ENLARGETH ITS DESIRE AS HELL, AND IS AS
 “ DEATH, AND CANNOT BE SATISFIED, BUT seek-
 “ eth TO GATHER UNTO ITSELF ALL NATIONS,
 “ AND TO HEAP UNTO ITSELF ALL PEOPLE.”
 The malignity of this flagitious ambition, of these unparalleled efforts, will stimulate every man to an increased vigilance, and will excite a manly firmness in their resistance; will elevate our minds above petty animosities, and the paltry gratification of selfish passions, and unite us in the cordial exertion of all those faculties and means with which God hath endowed us,

* 2 Theſſ. ii. 19.

† Habakkuk ii. 5.

each man in his respective station, for the preservation of our dearest interests, and the consolidation of our national strength. But that we may render this energy and vigour effectual; that we may avert the divine displeasure; that we may conciliate the divine blessing and assistance, and obtain the only substantial security against the diffusion of these delusive and fatal theories, it is manifest that we must at least evince as much industry in the defence of religious truth, as its enemies have exerted for its subversion, and in the support of the most execrable sophistry. Our love of our country will indeed be most eminently manifested, by an unshaken adherence to the truth and precepts of our holy Religion, by our strengthened resolution to SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS HIMSELF; AND TO LET HIM BE OUR FEAR, AND LET HIM BE OUR DREAD: our patriotism will be still invigorated and confirmed by this impressive consideration, that in the present contest, all the zeal and efforts which are employed in defence of our just rights,

rights, and in behalf of our country, are also employed in the defence and maintenance of Christianity itself. This consideration is adequate to our support under trials and afflictions, much more grievous than those which the providence of God hath yet called upon us to sustain: it is this which, in a particular manner, authorizes and emboldens the ministers of the gospel of peace to add their sanction to the calls of public duty; to invoke the blessings of the Almighty on the exertions of their countrymen in no common cause, and to animate those exertions by the influence of no common motives. * “FOR MY
 “BRETHREN AND COMPANIONS SAKE, I WILL
 “WISH THEE PROSPERITY: YEA, BECAUSE OF THE
 “HOUSE OF THE LORD OUR GOD, I WILL SEEK THY
 “GOOD.”

* Psalm cxxii. 8, 9.

F I N I S.

